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Ministry of Advanced Education

$450K WILL BUILD CAMPUS GATHERING PLACE IN CRANBROOK

CRANBROOK – The Province is providing the College of the Rockies with $450,000 to build a gathering place in Cranbrook that will enhance support services for the growing number of young Aboriginal students at the campus, East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett announced today.

"The Aboriginal population is a significant and vital part of the Cranbrook area, and the creation of this gathering place celebrates their local contributions," Bennett said. "Offering assistance and support to our Aboriginal students will help build a strong foundation for their future success and their desire to give back to the community."

Up to $15 million will be provided for Aboriginal gathering places at public post-secondary institutions over the next three years. Besides the College of the Rockies, the first round of funding includes Okanagan College, Kwantlen University College, Northern Lights College, Langara College and the College of New Caledonia. The funding is part of the Province's $65-million strategy to help Aboriginal students start, stay in and succeed in post-secondary education.

"We are breaking down the barriers that have prevented so many of our Aboriginal people from being all they can be," Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell said. "At the same time, we're helping our province meet skills shortages by making sure the growing number of young Aboriginal people in B.C. have the knowledge and skills to build great careers."

The College of the Rockies, which is in the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa Nation, plans to build an arbour that will incorporate architectural elements of a traditional Ktunaxa teepee, reflecting the cultural heritage of the region.

The arbour, currently in the design phase, is expected to include a firepit that can seat up to 30 people and landscaping with indigenous plants. The gathering place will be suitable for ceremonial purposes as well as a formal area for teaching and learning. It will also serve as a meeting place and as a focal point for the campus grounds.

"This initiative will create an opportunity for the college to recognize the First People of our region," said Nick Rubidge, college president. "It will also assist in giving Ktunaxa and all Aboriginal people a higher profile within the College of the Rockies community and the community at large."

More than 17,200 First Nation, Métis and Inuit students attended B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions in 2007, an increase of more than 16 per cent since 2002. However, according to B.C. Statistics, a non-Aboriginal person is five times as likely to have a university degree as an Aboriginal person living on reserve, and almost three times more likely than an Aboriginal person off reserve.

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Improving quality and choice in education is a key pillar of the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda. The gathering places funding also supports the government's commitments through the Transformative Change Accord and the Métis Nation Relationship Accord to close the gaps by 2015 in education, health, housing, and economic opportunities that separate Aboriginal British Columbians from other residents.

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